

## **BEFORE AND AFTER KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES : AFTER ACTION REVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Implementation of a knowledge management (KM) project in an organization requires a strategy that is unique and exclusive. After Action Review (AAR) is a valuable strategy that is highly useful and appropriate to be conducted in line with other KM strategies. Refusal in implementing AAR would likely result in a negative impact. In this paper, the significance and method of implementing AAR are explained. The AAR process should be conducted at the end of a project and should be used as a guideline for new teams that are about to embark on various projects.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge management; Knowledge management strategy; After action review

### **INTRODUCTION**

Knowledge of competitors, customers and the market are assets that any firm must manage and nurture as they would with any other assets (Campbell, Schryer-Roy and Jessani, 2008). However, the character that knowledge possesses is not akin to assets like money, manpower, land or property. Knowledge has a significant yet an exceptional stance and quality unlike the others. In the midst of today's highly digitalized era, an individual is capable of amassing wealth, materialistic needs or accomplish his or her desires with the basis of knowledge. Davenport and Prusak (1998) stated that "knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and applied in the minds of the owners".

### **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Knowledge management or KM is just as imperative to an individual or a firm corresponding to its extensive outcome. KM is literally a knowledge extracting process in a directly useful form from the organization's information assets. Definitions of KM are abundant as given by experts according to their understanding, experience and personal perception. However, there is one definition that is generally accepted which regards KM as a systematic process

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for creating, acquiring and disseminating, leveraging and using knowledge to retain a competitive advantage and to achieve organizational goals (Nigam and Sanjay, 2008).

Besides tacit and explicit knowledge, knowledge can be categorized as follows:

a. **Structured Information**

This is explicit knowledge that is recorded in documents and databases. This form of knowledge is easily viable and evident and the application of it depends on the quality of the metadata and terms and condition of its usage.

b. **Embedded Knowledge**

This knowledge often endures an updating or upgrading process to ensure its efficacy, security and safety. This form of knowledge is rarely found and obsoletes easily.

c. **Human Knowledge**

This knowledge is tacit in manner. It's intrinsic in nature, inside the mind of a person and persists to expand through learning, observing and experience. This knowledge is fundamental to two of the former types of knowledge above (Davenport and Prusack, 1998).

A KM system is a substantial necessity for almost all enterprises, be it business, entertainment or education that are customer-driven. Relocating and segmenting information is vital in instigating creative and innovative solutions in addition to improving the services and products. Through a KM system, organizations are able to manipulate any information received regardless of its types.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF KNOWLEDGE: MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

To date, there is no one 'ready to use' strategy in practice in KM. Moreover, it is not plausible for an organization to apply a similar KM strategy that has been practiced by other organizations simply for the reason that those organizations have achieved their aims through it. In administrating a strategy for any KM strategy there are a number of aspects that need to be considered. For instance, our own assets, needs, mandate, mission, goals and duration vital to be taken into account in formulating a strategy.

Bob Boiko noted that to do knowledge, content, document or any other kind of management well, you must be able and be willing to form simple propositions about what information should do for your organization. You must also be willing to reiterate your propositions over and over again. At some point, every conversation needs to come back to one proposition about what information could be doing for the organization (Guptara, 1996).



## **AFTER ACTION REVIEW**

The After Action Review or AAR was established by the United States Army and was initially known as the feedback technique. It functions similar to that of S.L.A Marshall's "interviews after combat" that was used during World War II, and the 'performance critique' technique that was used to acquire feedbacks before the 1970s (Srikantaiah and Koenig, 2008). Thereafter, the AAR underwent several transformations through changes in time and technology. The AAR process has now been generally accepted and utilized extensively due to the expression of it being an effective process that is focused on inculcating collective training.

## **PURPOSE OF AFTER ACTION REVIEW**

The aim of the AAR is to provide feedback to the training audience about a previous project's results against the project's objectives. It also introduces the successes and errors in order to improve future individual and collective performances. Typically, the success and failure in a KM project is not determined by anyone. But when a KM project fails, it is often associated with events such as technological system failure, functional and human capital efficiency errors. Blaming individuals and technologies for a failure is an incompetent character in any KM project.

Supposedly, 90% of the success in a KM project relies on the strategy formulated before the KM project implementation. The sketching of the strategy provides a basic understanding on what and how a KM project moves on. There are various types of strategies practiced in a KM project and AAR is the only strategy that becomes the backbone for the success of a KM project. AAR is a process that easily inspires an organization to move away from flaws and failures that has long been a menace. Besides impelling us to be vigilant in our tasks, it also propels us to improve future performances.

When the strategy is applied by all the members of the KM team, there will be faith and persistence in accomplishing the desired KM project. Typically, each organization requires its employees to concentrate and stay focus to their respective performances whilst learning from the successes and failures that occur in the organization.

In such circumstances, the AAR strategy is feasible to be applied for practice. Although the AAR strategy is generally seen as being simple and trouble-free, the impact it produces is of a sizeable magnitude. Apart from that, the AAR which is put into effect after a project ends, would not only assist others but one could even discover all the efforts that have been invested. Collective conclusion or decision-making through AAR could be an expedient example for future

teams to replicate the successful strategies and avoid or be vigilant in undertaking strategies that could yield failure.

### **TYPES OF AFTER ACTION REVIEW**

AAR brings events into an organization's 'learning cycle', providing evidence and experience for modifying future practices and goals. The AAR implementation can be classed as formal and informal.

- a. Formal – conducted by a facilitator with presence of strong logistical support
- b. Informal – occurring on the same day as the event or program under review

The AAR event is important since it is an open, honest and professional discussion. The discussion is represented by all members of a team and other teams that would be engaged in future projects. The discussion focuses on the decisions made with reference to the project that was implemented. New teams should attend the AAR event since many essentials such as aspects that need to be sustained in implementing new projects will be discussed besides suggestions and recommendations on handling obstacles and impediments.

This strategy should not only be used at the end of every project but it is also sensible to exercise it half way through the project so as to monitor its effectiveness, achievements and blunders made. This would clarify the KM team of their trajectory and maneuver them right back on their preferred track.

### **METHODS TO CONDUCT AFTER ACTION REVIEW**

In line with the definitions, there are numerous methods and procedures on how to conduct AAR found in KM books. Studies on the steps involved in the AAR process addressed the following questions:

- a. What should have happened?
- b. What actually happened?
- c. What were the differences? (From plan to actual)
- d. What lessons can we bring forward the next time?

More to the point, matters like technical performance, techniques, communications, lessons learnt, roles and responsibilities, organizational issues, stress impact and other related issues have to be well thought of in the AAR process. As mentioned before, there are two ways to conduct the AAR process namely formally or informally. Four processes that were recommended by research-matters.net (Malhotra, 2004) are:



1) Planning the AAR

- What will be reviewed (event and activity)
- When it is to be held
- Who will be attending it
- Where it is being held
- How it contributes to other programs (Nicholas, 2004)

2) Preparing for the AAR

- Select a capable and trustful facilitator (either an internal person or external person) .
- An Internal person refers to a staff who is involved in the project and an external person means an outside consultant.
- Arrange necessary materials to run the event in order for the group team and others to understand

3) Conducting the AAR

- Confirm full participation
- All participant are provided equal rights to express their opinions
- Ensure that the goal of improving the organization project is achieved
- Record the event in a highly confidential manner

4) Follow up the AAR

- Conduct management meeting to discuss findings of the AAR
- Implement recommendations as much as possible
- Document and provide lessons learnt about the AAR project to the entire community in the organization in order to improve it in future.

However, results of observations from several studies saw a number of key factors that are capable of providing an effective impact to the AAR such as:

- a. Event design
- b. Timing and attendance
- c. Format and content
- d. Facilitation
- e. Follow up
- f. Sharing the AAR result

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Facilitators and team members should pay attention to these key aspects prior to scheduling the AAR session.

### **Event Design**

There are several approaches that can be used to design the AAR discussion. To organize an AAR, one needs to focus on themes, content, reporting and measurement. The 'event' needs to be arranged according to chronological order for easy understanding.

### **Timing and Attendance**

Timing is a crucial and discipline factor that needs to be accounted for in an AAR. It is generally recognized that timely feedback is essential to improve performance. Therefore, it is preferred that it should be given as soon as the project has been conducted. The AAR should be attended by all members of a team and forthcoming teams that will conduct a KM project. A facilitator should be assigned to generate an open environment, promote discussion and draw out lessons learnt (McNeilly, 2002).

### **Format and Content**

Facilitator and team members are advised to study the KM project process with reference to a few questions. The questions should function to re-project the objective of the project, obstacles faced while conducting the project, root causes of the successes and failures besides assisting to identify Specific Actionable Recommendations (SARs) for future projects. It is sensible that the questions be constructed so that they are easily comprehensible as the following:

- a. What was supposed to happen?
- b. What actually happened?
- c. Why did it happen?
- d. What can be learned from this experiences?

### **Facilitation**

Subsequent to experimenting and analyzing the processes of a KM project, the team members need to be allotted some time for thought and jot down some ideas for the proceeding discussion. During the discussion, the facilitator is entitled to avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions to ensure that the discussion ends in a concerted and collective conclusion. The following aspects are also to be considered by the facilitator during the discussion:

- a. Each member is given an equal opportunity to voice out their views and opinions
- b. Ensure members specify their reviews to avoid giving a general opinion



- c. Ensure the discussion emphasizes on success and failure of the project and suggestion towards achieving the AAR's objectives.
- d. Encourage the team members to uncover their own strength and weaknesses.

### **Follow Up**

Subsequent to the discussion, vital factors should be identified. The session should be able to link observations to recommendations for future improvement. The facilitator should discuss on arranging the report for the AAR.

### **Sharing the Result**

This is the final step of the AAR. The benefit of implementing an AAR is the efficacy of the report produced for forthcoming projects and teams. There are various ways to prepare a report and some aspects to be given careful consideration are:

- a. Making concrete decision and suggesting actions that could refine the quality of upcoming projects.
- b. Highlighting the topics that require direct attention from the team leader.

### **CONCLUSION**

Each and every methodology in project management signifies outcomes and feedback. Although the AAR was developed by the US Army for military purposes, its utilization became extensive due to its capability to summarize a detailed project. It is undeniable that not many organizations are concerned about the AAR given that their project had already display the outcome entirely. Nevertheless, implementing AAR is astute and necessary to discover the actions or aspects that would yield a likely favourable outcome. It is unfair to abandon a project that has been implemented involving high costs. The report prepared and produced at the end of the AAR process gives inspiration and knowledge to the team that endured the project besides functioning as a guideline for new projects.

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